

Concluding Remarks

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In attempting to synthesize the theoretical questions formulated during this symposium, I think we could fit the majority of approaches into four bipolar sets. The first dipole would be an extreme and deeply revisionist attitude critical of traditional approaches to social and human science, a vision represented within the set of questions stridently formulated with the prefix 'post-' In contrast, and at the extreme other pole, support for highlighting the values of old disciplinary traditions was also quite present.

A second dipole involves the contrast between eminently theoretical and rational positions as contrasted with analyses based rather on real human experiences. In the third instance, some of the presenters have compiled work about culture, symbols and ideologies, whereas others have highlighted social processes and political decision-making. Finally, many presenters have focused on an analysis of speech, whereas others have paid more attention to action.

Each of these eight extreme points in these relative bipolarities displays, as its center focus, an undoubtedly suggestive core. Sometimes the extreme bipolarisation has been modified through synthetic approaches, and through positions of compromise. I found the efforts to link some polarized elements with others, especially meaningful. I was most enriched by certain moments in the presentations in which the links between differing focal points seemed to shine most brilliantly.

I am going to try to propose briefly some ideas about the importance of how to move between one extreme and another, on this map of polarities. Above all, I find it important to speak about culture in terms of social life, with all its tensions, strategies, conflicts, understandings and misunderstandings, and to realize that there are indeed borders and social barriers. Present trends point toward thinking of collective identity as a problem of assignment: self-assignment and hetero-assignment. Ethnicity is understood as a way of organizing cultural life, a life in which social barriers existed before any possible or imagined cultural limits. Assignment, acceptance, and the conviction of belonging to a group, is what builds the reality of the group. It must be said too that formation of social limits is never exclusively social. Social barriers are built from culture, or from within a cultural flow, being partly culture-conscious. Using culture, making and manufacturing culture, and deriving its consequences, some that

are not always intended, make up social barriers.

Based on these assumptions, one can reflect on what some of the participants had to say about the idea of "cultural unities." The old notion of culture as a homogeneous unity, constant through tradition, shared, the holder of the popular spirit, is now at a critical juncture. Herder's ideas have given ideological content to nascent concepts of the nation-state. His idea of cultural unity forms part of the methodological background of Anthropology in its study of different "tribal" cultures considered as integrated wholes.

The most frequent point of view in Anthropology nowadays tends to think that there are no clear cultural barriers, but rather sets of similarities and diversities that transmit an image close to that of a cultural continuum all over the planet. Faced with the prospect of isolated units having static traits, the prospect of a more dynamic network, and a strong notion of the extraordinary cultural heterogeneity at the heart of each country or social group, will prevail in the future. Such a future will be a prospect of the bipolarity of conflictivity and cultural controversy at one extreme, as opposed to the notion of culture as shared traits at the other end of the spectrum.

The migration of peoples and cultural forms, racial and cultural crossbreeding, the ease and rapidity of relationships—all these are contemporary realities that help distort the old idea of a geographical mosaic of cultural unities and barriers. Now, professional, economic and status differences mark out distances within a geographical area and suggest real nearness above and beyond geographical distance. On a personal level, after this long trip from the far west to the far east of the old world, I feel culturally much closer to my Japanese fellow-anthropologists than to rural dwellers a mere thirty miles from my home.

We should not, therefore, confuse collective identity with feelings of ethnicity or nationhood, or with the existence of cultural unities, or with "*emic*" arguments with which the very sense of collective identity is justified, based as they are on more or less imaginary diacritics.

Disappearance of barriers, and even the currently powerful process of globalization, cannot obscure the fact that cultural diversity is still extraordinarily deep and prominent in our world. Various differences in cultural circumstances can be added to the "imagined" convictions of belonging to distinct cultural collectivities. People live with a profound sense of belonging to a unity. Our attitude should be one of rational criticism, as well as one of understanding and respect for profound convictions, often fundamental to the striving to make life meaningful.

Faced with both these ideas, it is still valid to talk of cultural borders, just as much as it is still equally valid to try to cross cultural borders. Many significant things

have been said, in this conference, about borders. Let me repeat some of them: "Border as a meeting point," "We are on the border," and "Culture is a border."

As I have described the four dipoles at the outset, this conference has traced the interrelationships, stressing that we place new stress on the human being, instead of noting the dehumanisation of the Social Sciences. But to do this, it is essential to focus on meaning, values, inwardness and practice. We should not focus on speech alone, but also observe expressive action. While gathering data and experiences, we should move between dialogue and observation. We should bear in mind that verbal language should be understood in the context of non-verbal expression, and meaningful non-verbal actions should be understood in the context of verbal expression.

Action and decision in the context of significant events and special circumstances, together with actions that course continuously throughout our daily life will allow us to get into the living world we study in a much deeper way.

Some of the presentations at the symposium have made reference to the idea of representation, a fundamental element implied in its theme of Crossing Cultural Borders. Some of us constantly represent others. It is certainly inevitable that we represent others both individually and collectively. In fact, social life is largely a game of representation. The variety of the forms we use to represent others is extraordinary. The *Transcultural Institute* and our present meeting highlight the moral responsibility of hearing and comprehending others, and of helping to build representations that are more understanding of others. Within the field of museographical representation, we have spoken about the possibilities of offering participation to those who are represented, so that the representation itself can be reviewed. The spirit of dialogical representation is the same spirit which inspires the *Transcultural Institute*. We are trying to make it possible to review the images that others project about us. We want to give others the possibility of participating in the construction of our images about them. This nomadic as well as dynamic Institute functions through encounters with the paradigmatic content of what is intended to be transmitted. Perhaps we should refer to ourselves not as nomads, but rather as pilgrims. The existential content of pilgrimage carries the metaphorical key to dialogical representation. People move, visit, contact, converse and live together, travelling together towards a new cultural experience.

In many countries, old roads of pilgrimage have experienced an extraordinary revitalisation. We are deeply involved in a significant project for the Pilgrim's Road to Santiago in the year 2000, a pilgrim's road through the heart of Europe to its westernmost limits. We will try to walk some of the way on foot, treading in the footsteps of the thousands of pilgrims over the centuries, looking through their eyes, and with the same symbolic goals and effort. On the way, we intend to search for the

proximity of people. We intend to live out a comparison between the diverse circumstances of pilgrimage, and we hope to squeeze out that existential juice that only comes from human encounter, on a common road, one that is above and beyond borders.